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ABSTRACT

Poster sessions at professional meetings have become popular in recent years. Properly prepared poster presentations not only provide an excellent format for communicating innovative ideas or research results, but also allow for individual communication between the presenter(s) and interested individuals. Furthermore, poster session programs allow participants to survey many presentations and focus on those of specific interest. Poster presentations (with their emphasis on modern graphics) do require more time to prepare than traditional paper presentations, however, and are more difficult to transport. Since this format of information exchange can accommodate a number of presenters and a variety of topics, professional organizations are likely to continue using poster sessions as a part of their professional meetings. (PRA)

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POSTER PRESENTATION:

The Key to Communication of Ideas



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Introduction

Poster presentations are the latest avenue which has been used for communication among professionals at national meetings. Many professional associations and societies include poster presentations as a major component of their professional meetings. As many teacher educators have noted at recent meetings of AATEA, there has been a proliferation of concurrent oral presentations which may lead to frustration at these events. Poster sessions can alleviate much of the pressure if given a chance (Fretz, 1979).

Members of AATEA are familiar with oral presentations as a means of communicating information and ideas. In those presentations, only a few questions may be asked as time permits. Reaction to the orally presented paper may be limited due to a wide gap in the interest and understanding between the audience and the presenter. In addition, the audience may be reluctant to ask question because the speaker is too far ahead or behind to know where the "cutting edge" really lies (Anon, 1978).

What is it?

A poster presentation is an effective way to share research data and information with fellow AATEA members. A poster consists of a series of illustrations containing information mounted on various sizes of poster boards to describe innovative ideas or research results to interested parties on an informal basis. Also, more individuals will have an opportunity to view poster presentations as compared with concurrent oral presentations. This method of presentations are appropriate for topics which involve demonstrations of techniques, specialized equipment, or written materials. Posters allow the viewers to absorb an overview of many research studies or ideas and focus on those of interest to each individual. Poster presentations also allow for a more relaxed atmosphere for the exchange of information than do formal oral presentations.

Planning the Poster Format

In planning a poster presentation, it is important to: know your audience, the reasons that they are interested in your presentation, the present level of expertise on the topic, and the expectations of the audience. It is important to especially remember the limitations of the audience.

A working title and list of facts or points to be communicated should be prepared. A sequential ordering of the points and an outline of the presentation is also necessary. By making a flow diagram, grouping ideas and facts, an orderly design may be sketched to organize the flow of information being presented. In preparing text, a good general guideline is "keep it simple". The audience will only carry a few ideas away with them no matter how grandiose the presentation. The desired message should be expressed in as few words as possible.

The poster presentation is a summary or abstract of an idea, activity, or research. Only the amount of information that can be absorbed by the viewer in five minutes or less should be presented. If more time than this is required by the reviewer, the presenter can verbally communicate additional information to the interested party. Pictures and words must work together to amplify, clarify, and extend the focal point of the poster. Adding details and specific examples is acceptable; however, "busy" or "wordy" posters can interfere with the process of effective communication. Above all, when planning poster presentations, read and follow the instructions and guidelines provided by the sponsoring organization.

The contents of a poster are similar to a research paper, slide presentation, or other scientific communication. The poster should flow from left to right and top to bottom. The contents should include a title, authors, institution name(s), introduction, objectives, methods, results (in the form of illustrations, tables, figures, and text), short discussion, and conclusions. Once the content is determined, attention should be focused on preparing a quality presentation.

Focus on Quality

The quality of a poster presentation shows. Good graphic design attracts attention especially when color is added. Audiences of today are accustomed to high quality, high impact visuals.

The quality of graphic material is critically important to effectively communicate the intended message. Use bold, graphic elements and photos as large as feasible to convey information in place of written text. Use colorful letters, numbers, arrows, or lines effectively. Charts, graphs, drawings, and photographs lend themselves to having color added which results in a more attractive and effective poster.

A very important element of a poster presentation is the title panel. The title provides the initial visual attraction for a participant in a flood of visual stimuli at a poster session program. Normally the title board lists the title, author(s), institution(s), and is positioned across the top of the poster. The title should be readable from up to 20 feet away from the display. Lettering should be at least 1 1/4 inches for the title and 3/4 of an inch for the author and institution name(s). Title boards should be hinged or constructed to be rolled up for easier transporting.

In preparing text for the poster, keep it simple, concise, and short. Often times "bullet lists" are very effective ways to get the point across. Complete sentences and short paragraphs should be limited to the introduction and/or abstract. All lettering should be easily read from a distance of four to six feet. It is advisable to use bold or semi-bold black typeface for headings and labels.

The best type print can be made on a computer or by photo typesetting. Some microcomputers have the capability of producing high quality lettering up to 1 1/4 inches tall. A good word processing program or publishing program, attached to a laser or ink jet printer can give excellent results. In some cases, you may need to use hand lettering, stencils, vinyl lettering, or transfer type lettering. These methods are more expensive, more time consuming, and usually less effective. Highlighting or using colored headings will capture attention and the interest of potential viewers as well as enabling your poster to stand out in the line of poster presentations.

Graphs, figures, or pictures may be produced with some microcomputers. Enlarged color pictures can be produced with laser copiers. Laser copiers have the capability of enlarging photographs or making pictures from slides. Different types of photo finishing paper are available to give different qualities to your photographs. When mounting text, graphs, figures, or pictures, care should be taken to use contrasting colors to "show off" the information. White paper on white background will cause a "white out" effect and the text may be lost in the background. A good rule of thumb is to always mount light items on darker, contrasting colors and mount darker items on white or light-colored paper. Leave a border from 1/4 inch to 1 inch around any artwork or text. Keep poster sections small enough to fit into a suitcase or briefcase. Transporting larger pieces can become a problem. Be sure to blend colors so they do not clash. People may lose interest before they actually begin to review the poster.

A spray adhesive or rubber cement works best for mounting. White glue should not be used, due to the uneven appearance it creates. Subject content can also be mounted on a stiffener board such as "foam core", poster board, or plexiglass. Foam core material is available in a variety of thicknesses. This will alleviate problems of curling or distortion due to humidity and temperature changes. Multiple layers of foam core can also be used to effectively build up a three-dimensional approach. Push pins or velcro strips work well for attaching text and graphics to the poster board. A ruler is also handy to assure even spacing and uniform appearance of the finished poster. A variety of accessory materials should be brought to use at the time of poster setup. Items which may be needed include: extra pushpins, backing material, a portable hand vacuum, and a staple gun. Staple guns may be needed if the board will not allow tacks to be pushed in. The more completely prepared the materials, the easier it will be to assemble the poster. Be prepared for the unexpected to happen.

It is also recommended that a supply of business cards or other form of identification be available to distribute to interested persons during the poster session program. A scratch pad should be available for persons interested in receiving more information to record their name and address. This pad may also be useful to make note of comments and questions from the participants during the program.

Conclusions

1. Properly prepared poster presentations provide an excellent format for communicating innovative ideas or research results.
2. Poster presentations allow for individual communication between the presenter(s) and interested individuals.
3. Poster session programs allow participants to survey many presentations and focus on those of specific interest.
4. Poster presentations require more time to prepare than a traditional paper presentations and are more difficult to transport.

Poster sessions at professional meetings have become popular in recent years. This format of information exchange can accommodate a number of presenters and a variety of topics. Professional organizations are likely to continue using poster sessions as part of their professional meetings.

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